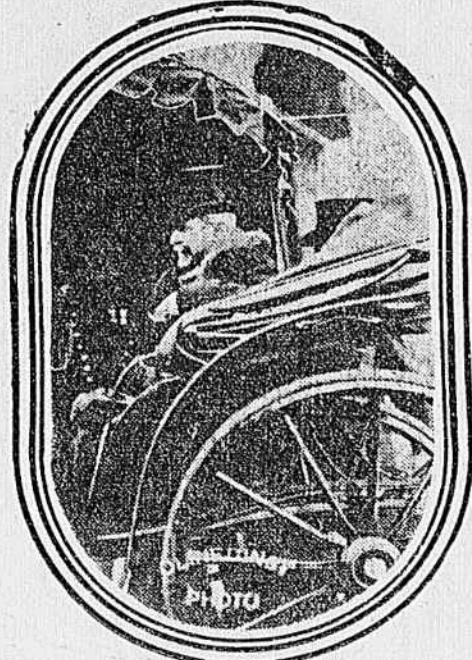


# Learning to Shine at Our Republican Court in Washington



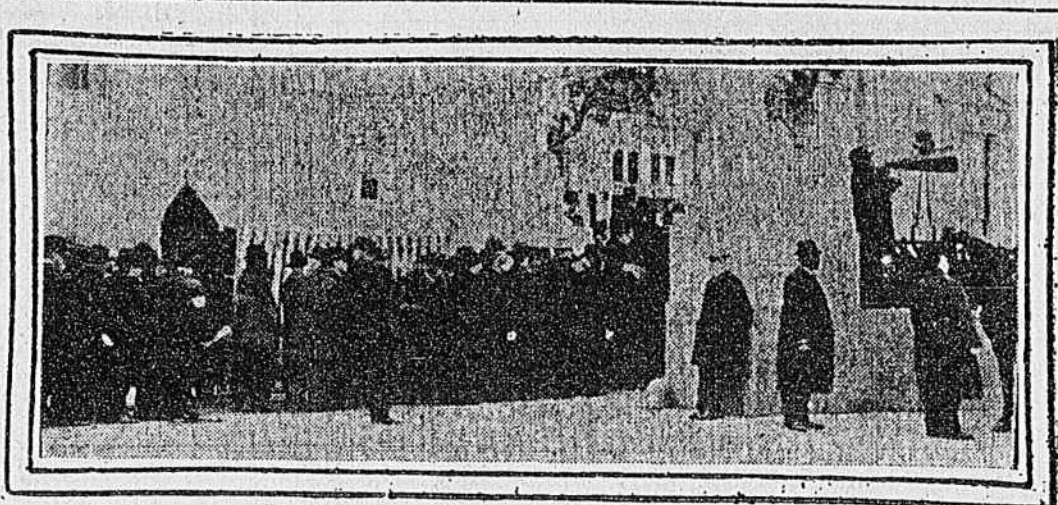
The Vice President goes calling.



French Ambassador out for a call.



Italian Ambassador and Wife calling on President.



Before the White House on a Reception Day.

The Novice Must Learn Surprising Things—The Patchwork Code That Governs Is Complicated and Formidable. Its Need of Revision—The Cause of Many Social Feuds. Congress and President Disagree as to Social Rank of Certain High Functionaries—What Will Be the Coming Season's Social Wars?

BY JOHN ELFRETH WATKINS.  
Washington, D. C., December 5, 1911.

SOMETIMES two great powers are upon the eve of destroying each other merely because two silly jades have quarreled. "Napoleon's warning to the wife of his ambassador, departing for Lisbon. And the social functions of our republican court have often brewed bitter enmities between great men. If not between great states. "What social feuds will we have this season?" Mistress Columbia asks herself now, when the gates of Vanity Fair are once more to swing open, for the capital has seen a winter when "twixt this time and Lent some high functionary or his wife (particularly the latter) has not divided officialdom into hostile camps because of a coveted place in a receiving line, an envied seat at table, or a dispute over the prerogative of the first call.

Such embitterments occur merely because official Washington has no social code. It is governed merely by a patchwork of precedents, handed down by the three co-ordinate branches of government, whose separate sections of the texture can never be fitted together. President Jefferson once tried to compile such a code, but failed miserably, and his successors, instead of deciding social questions, have merely smoothed

ed things over. An example of this is found in the case of the Cabinet, whose social rank has long been disputed by the Senate and the Supreme Court. At White House receptions the issue of assigning them a definite place in the line of guests is avoided by asking them, with their wives, to receive with the President and his wife, and thus form a part of his social family.

Can't Be Divided Together.

This is the only American city in which certain parts of high officials on perfectly good terms cannot properly be invited to the same dinner, simply because Dame Etiquette cannot find out which of the two is entitled to the place at table always reserved for the honor guest—that upon the hostess's right.

Official Washington has been called a chess board, in whose setting every man and woman is a piece or a pawn, with a place or row definitely fixed by the rules of the game. Pretty though this simile be, the fact is that the pieces are not set according to the same rules at both ends of the board. Thus, when Congress has charge of a ceremony, the Chief Justice and his associates are given a place ahead of the ambassadors, while at functions in charge of the executive branch of the government the ambassadors are placed ahead of the Supreme Court.

As a matter of fact, there will be small hope for a uniform social code, respected by all, until it has passed through the separate stages prescribed for other laws—until it has been proposed by the Executive, framed by Congress, approved by the President and interpreted by the Supreme Court.

Meanwhile official society will continue to be governed by its present body of laws, based upon precedent and subject to interpretation from administration to administration, through the interpretation of this heterogeneous corpus juris might frequently tax the resources of a John Marshall. There are many precepts generally accepted by society. In those the newcomer must be schooled. If he aspires to success in official society, where the penalty for ignorance is too often ostracism and remorse.

Etiquette Prescribed for President.

First of all, there are the long-ro-



German Ambassador and Family.

spected social laws governing the President himself. He must take precedence over all others in the land, even his wife—a status to which Garfield yielded only after uttering the protest, "I fail to see why I can't be President without being pig!" It is by virtue of this law that upon state

occasions the Chief Magistrate is served, at table, before his wife—a social order to which a woman made audible protest during a state dinner, some administrations back. Then, too, the President must be given the right-hand or "honor" seat of any vehicle in which he may ride. He does not at-

tend formal functions at the homes of foreign diplomats, and neither he nor his wife returns calls, save those of foreign executives visiting America. An invitation from him or his wife takes precedence even of earlier invitations and cancels all other social obligations. Thus a Senator who has already issued formal invitations for a dinner party next Wednesday must command his orders to the caterer and must withdraw his invitations if the President elects to host him with an invitation for the same evening. But this prerogative does not extend to the President's daughters. Several years back considerable ridicule was heaped upon a wealthy hostess who excused her daughter from the latter's own debutante dinner, on the ground that an invitation from Miss Roosevelt, coming a few hours before, had to be regarded as a "command."

Another rule prescribes that the President must be the last personage to enter any public assemblage or ceremony to which he is invited. The violation of this rule during the McKinley memorial exercises in the House of Representatives necessitated President Roosevelt's rising with the other guests to do homage to the Supreme Court, which, by an oversight, was given the honor of entering the hall last on the first call from the Vice-President. The incident was at once seized upon by the social critics, and considerable newspaper space was devoted to comment on the "incident."

Learning Use of Titles.

Another social rule concerning the President which debutantes and older newcomers in official society must be taught is that defining the mode of addressing him. Never as "Mr. Taft" or "Judge," but always as "Mr. President" must the greeting be. And by the same rule his inferiors are addressed "Mr. Vice-President," "Mr. Justice," "Mr. Secretary" or "Mr. Speaker," members of the upper body of Congress as "Senator," those of the lower body as "Mr. Speaker," "Congressman" or "Representative," ambassadors as "Excellency" and ministers as "Mr."

Many are the embarrassments which the social tyro at Washington has suffered because of ignorance of these little points. For months she may harbor resentment at the Vice-President's wife because the latter has not returned her call. Then, by accident, she learns that that lady never returns calls, except those of Senators' wives, and the little rent in her heart heals up.

And unless she has carefully studied the little blue "diplomatic list" she may make the faux pas of calling at an embassy or legation, where there is no hostess, the ambassador or minister being a bachelor or a daughterless widower.

The diplomatic corps, indeed, causes her more anxiety than any other body of officials residing at the capital, for it is made up for the most part of men who have received social training at courts of proud and punctilious monarchs.

Why Ambassadors Stayed Away.

A charming hostess who is highly connected as she is wealthy, and who is the chateleine of one of the "show houses" of the capital, suffered cruel embarrassment, some seasons back, simply because she had not mastered one little technicality of the code governing officialdom's dealings with this pampered coterie of foreigners. At an exquisite musical she invited a list of ambassadors "to meet"—as the invitations read—a functionary high in the esteem of society. But all of the ambassadors stayed away because their code forbids their accepting an invitation "to meet" any American except the President or his wife.

Another fact to be learned about the ambassadors is that their wives make first calls only at the White House and the home of the Vice-President. For some time this prerogative was dis-

puted by the late chief justice, but when the point was brought before Mrs. Roosevelt she ruled in favor of the ambassadors' wives.

Napoleon had in mind the women of the diplomatic corps when he admonished the Duchess d'Abrantes with the words quoted at the head of this article. And the same sensitiveness which he feared in his day is dreaded even to-day in all of the courts of the world, including our own. For under international law an ambassador is the sacred proxy of the Emperor, King or President whom he represents, and ever since the treaty of Westphalia that international code has accorded to the wives of ambassadors the same official honors and precedence which they themselves enjoy. Thus, an ambassador cannot be sued for debt, no matter how big the bill which she runs up with our merchants.

Diplomats and Diplomats.

The social neophyte must, however, master the distinction between ambassadors and ministers. If she is the wife of a new Supreme Court justice or a new Senator she must learn that, although she owes the first call to each ambassador's wife, she is entitled to the first call from the wives of all foreign ministers. This punctilious diplomatic body is a social world within itself, being governed socially by its "dean," the ambassador of longest residence in Washington—in the present instance Baron Hengelmueller who at Washington represents the person of Emperor Franz Joseph of Austria-Hungary. A generation ago a Washington host whose knowledge of social forms was exceeded by his zeal for social popularity selected the hostess, minister to escort his wife, the Spanish minister, who was dean of the diplomatic corps, was also present. The Spanish minister protested forthwith and the Secretary of State, who was fortunately present, restored the hostess to give the place of honor to the dean.

Officials Who Shouldn't Meet.

And if our novice seeks the advice of the capital's grand dames of the old school, she will be advised against inviting to the same board the Vice-President and Chief Justice, between whom social friction has always been maintained that he is second to no other official of the realm are legion. But since Mr. McKinley's ruling that the offices of President and Vice-President are, socially speaking, inseparable, the latter has been generally accorded second rank, and to-day the cautious host would better avoid entertaining the Chief Justice and dean of the diplomatic corps, or any of the ambassadors, at the same board, for, as stated, the question whether the head of the judiciary or the ambassadors deserve third place is a matter of dispute between Congress and the White House, the latter having favored the ambassadors during the past fifteen years. And it might be dangerous to invite to the same board the Chief Justice and Secretary of State, inasmuch as many claim for the latter rank directly following the President—this by virtue of the succession act which gives the presidency to the Secretary of State in case of the death of both President and Vice-President. Indeed, the Supreme Court has, in its time, had to dispute its rank with the Senate, which, by virtue of the fact that the Constitution mentions the judiciary third, claimed precedence. But after studying her little book carefully the

new Senator's wife will now pay a first call upon all of the Supreme Court women, although requiring first calls of the Cabinet women and the wives of Representatives.

Senate's Lost Prestige.

The Senate has lost some of the social prestige which it enjoyed in the days when Patrick Henry, for the time refused to consider an election thereto because, as he said, it was too old to fall into the "awkward imitations" which had become of it. It claimed precedence over the diplomatic corps, and old-timers in Washington society recall an exciting occasion when a certain Senator's wife made a loud uproar because her host escorted the wife of a foreign minister to the dining room and thereby deprived her of her seat of honor. But the ambassadors, like a wedge, forced their way in above the Senate, which at the same time had to yield to the Supreme Court, and thus came down two pegs.

But the new Cabinet wife who elects to test her rank with that of any Senator's consort will find herself up against a stone wall. "Fear of senatorial power over our husbands has prevented our open revolt," explained one Cabinet wife. "The demand by the wives of Senators that we call upon them first is a species of social blackmail to which we are compelled to submit." The Cabinet still yields to the Senate in the matter of first calls, despite the fact that the Cabinet is in succession to the presidency.

They Are Social Anomalies.

Cabinet wives have certain prerogatives which may awaken resentment among the uninitiated. Because they receive more calls than any other women in official life, Dame Etiquette forbids them to accept of the necessity of returning, in person, calls from other than personal friends. Their purely formal visits are returned by card only upon a Cabinet wife who has called upon a lady who does not accompany the bit of Bristolboard bearing her name. She is also surprised to find that no address is upon the card, but later learns that Cabinet women omit this detail.

And the wife of the new representative is, indeed, counted by a harrowing task, if she wishes to enjoy the social pleasures, for custom exacts of her calls upon all of the women of officialdom, through the Supreme Court, diplomatic, Cabinet and senatorial circles. And it is for her to take this initiative with a new species of social longer exchange of courtesies among merely the wives of her own State are often task enough for a single season.

Representatives' Wives Left Out.

When it comes to invitations to great functions really worth attending, the representative's wife often finds herself and the other women of her circle ignominiously ignored. Invitation lists frequently include the whole of officialdom, in order, down to the House of Representatives, where, after the Speaker's name, the list is drawn upon a notable occasion this distinction was the cause of no little comment and bitterness. This was when the wife of a former Secretary of State, sitting upon herself to issue cards requesting the women of official life to call upon her first visit to America, omitted to pay her first visit to the wife of the President's family, wives of representatives being expected to call, for many years, on the wife of the President of the House upon other than stated reception days.

As has doubtless been gleaned from the foregoing, it is at her dinners that Washington's new hostess makes her worst blunders, and one of the commonest of these is the seating of favored officials who are being entertained at the same time. She wishes to entertain, say, her partner, from her home city, to invite some distinguished guests to "meet" him. But if any high Federal official of the categories stated, are invited to her repeat, the dear person must yield place to them, and she must go to her table upon the arm of the highest official present, whether he be a justice, a Senator or a Cabinet officer. And she must not invite anyone already suggested, nor persons not catalogued above themselves in the official list; nor must she invite married people "to meet" those who are unmarried.

Other Things to Know.

She must know that an officer of the army, after her table, must be given place above the naval officers, and that relative rank that invitations for formal dinners should be issued three weeks before the time in advance, and that such functions should not be held earlier than 8 o'clock.

Debutantes and other novices in official society have as much to learn regarding the proprieties of not merely dispensing hospitality, but of accepting it. Thus they must know that an invitation to the President's board demands a call within three days, while to a card reception demands no call; that when calling upon the President's wife she should leave but one week before a formal invitation to dinner must be acknowledged upon the day of its receipt.

Indeed, the patchwork social code which governs official galatties in Washington is so complex that it may well discourage persons from distant parts who are otherwise ambitious for social life, which to the casual reader who has never had the time or inclination even for the social formalities of his home community, such conventions are above described may be sneered and sniffed at as flipperies and fopperies unworthy of the serious thought devoted to them. But in those Washington, as nowhere else in America, society is business, and business to be effective must be conducted with system. It will be according to the old maxims, "Without hesitation, kiss the slipper, or whatever else the etiquette of that court requires." (Copyright, 1911, by John Elfreth Watkins.)

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